



USDA Status Report

Computer Connectivity Team

May 18, 2001 - Report No. 3

Introduction

The Computer Connectivity Team had its second development meeting May 1 – 3. The team began by reviewing the contractor's presentation of a flow chart of the commodity food ordering business process and also a proposed data flow for the new system. Discussions covered information flow to and from school districts, states, and FNS. The contractor also presented a conceptual prototype for the functions identified at the first development session.

Discussion

The team discussed "exception processing", entitlement tracking, and order tracking. Exception processing includes all possible changes to delivery orders and entitlements, including transfers, diversions, and over, short, or damaged adjustments. These changes occur in the mainframe system, and the challenge is ensuring that those changes flow to the school district level in an understandable form.

The team also discussed Customer Relations Management (CRM), which are user education tools. Possible options are frequently asked questions (FAQ's), tutorials, self-help tools, and terminology glossaries. The team decided that tutorials and pop-up definitions have merit, but more specific tools will be defined once the computer software is selected.

Finally, the team discussed reporting and information dissemination. Team members evaluated current reports available to states, and discussed which reports were necessary both at a state and school district level. The team agreed that important information dissemination, such as due dates, food safety issues, or entitlement updates, can occur through bulletin boards, emails, or both. The team then discussed the types of information that are necessary, and determined the best tool to get that information to states and recipients.

Throughout the discussions of the first two development meetings, the team has agreed on some desired features of the new system.

- Entitlement will not be split between Group A and Group B
- State ability to build truckloads on one screen, based on recipient requests
- State ability to tailor commodity offerings and delivery periods
- State ability to enter orders
- Provide reports similar to EDI
- Provide current delivery order status
- Auto-messaging features

Next Step

The team will conduct its third development session June 12 - 14. This session was delayed so the contractor can complete research on software that best meets the requirements the team outlined in the first two development sessions. The contractor will have another prototype for the team to review and the team will further discuss additional system details.